

# Report of ACEJMC Evaluation

Undergraduate program  
2023–2024

Name of Institution: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Name and Title of Chief Executive Officer: Dr. Timothy D. Sands, President

Name of Unit: School of Communication

Name and Title of Administrator: Director John C. Tedesco, Ph.D., APR

Date of 2023-2024 Accrediting Visit: Feb. 11-14, 2024

Date of the previous accrediting visit: This is an initial visit for accreditation consideration

Recommendation of the previous site visit team: N/A

Previous decision of the Accrediting Council: N/A

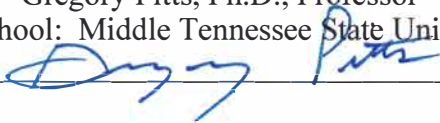
## Recommendation by 2023-2024 Visiting Team: Initial Accreditation

*Prepared and submitted by:*

### Team Chair

Name and Title: Gregory Pitts, Ph.D., Professor  
Organization/School: Middle Tennessee State University

Signature



### Team Member

Name and Title: Andrew Alexander, Visiting Professional  
Organization/School: Ohio University

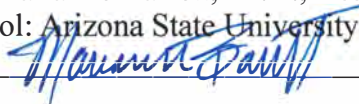
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### Team Member

Name and Title: Marianne Barrett, Ph.D., Associate Professor Emerita  
Organization/School: Arizona State University

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### Team Member

Name and Title: Kenn Gaither, Ph.D., Dean, School of Communications  
Organization/School: Elon University

Signature



## PART I: General Information

**Name of Institution:** Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech)

**Name of Unit:** School of Communication

**Year of Visit:** 2024

### 1. Check regional association by which the institution now is accredited.

Higher Learning Commission

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

New England Commission on Higher Education

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Southern Association of Colleges and School Commission on Colleges

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

### 2. Indicate the institution's type of control; check more than one if necessary.

Private

Public

Other (specify)

### 3. Provide assurance that the institution has legal authorization to provide education beyond the secondary level. It is not necessary to include entire authorizing documents. Public institutions may cite legislative acts; private institutions may cite charters or other authorizing documents.

Virginia Governor Carlton Walker signed legislation March 19, 1872, to establish at Blacksburg the Commonwealth's land-grant college for white men. The Virginia General Assembly created what is today Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University under provisions of the federal Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862. The institution officially opened Oct. 1, 1872, as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College. After a reorganization in the 1890s, the General Assembly changed the name, effective March 5, 1896, to Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute. Admission opened to white women in 1921.

The General Assembly shortened the name to Virginia Polytechnic Institute June 23, 1944. In 1953, VPI became the first historically white higher education institution in the old Confederacy to admit black students. The General Assembly granted VPI university status June 26, 1970, and renamed it Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The institution's official nickname is Virginia Tech.

### 4. Has the journalism/mass communications unit been evaluated previously by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications?

Yes

No

### 5. When was the unit or sequences within the unit first accredited by ACEJMC?

NA

### 6. Unit's mission statement. Statement should give date of adoption and/or last revision.

#### Mission (revised 2020)

The School of Communication develops and enhances understanding of communication processes and their effects on individuals, organizations, culture, and society. The school meets its mission through discovery, learning, and engagement focused on creation, distribution, and interpretation of messages through media systems. We create and share knowledge about the interaction of messages and media within historical, economic, technological, and cultural environments.

The School of Communication offers five undergraduate majors: Advertising, Communication, Multimedia Journalism, Public Relations, and Sports Media and Analytics. These majors lead to a B.A. in Communication. The five majors, each grounded in a strong liberal arts curriculum, prepare students for careers in journalism, broadcasting, digital media production, public relations, advertising, sports media, business, public service, government, and professional specializations, such as law. Coursework in the school focuses on strategic, theoretical, and practical application of message creation, delivery, and analysis. Graduates from each major are prepared to apply their skills immediately in various professional settings or continue their studies in graduate school.

**7. What are the type and length of terms?**

- Number of weeks in a semester: 16 weeks
- Number of weeks in a quarter: NA
- Number of weeks in summer sessions: 2 six-week sessions and one 12-week session
- Number of weeks in intersessions: 3 weeks (winter)

**8. Check the programs offered in journalism/mass communications:**

Bachelor’s degree

Master’s degree

Ph.D. degree

**9. List the specific undergraduate degrees as well as the majors or sequences being reviewed by ACEJMC. \*Indicate online degrees.**

Bachelor of Arts in Communication

- Multimedia Journalism major
- Public Relations major
- Sports Media and Analytics major

**10. Credit hours required by the university for an undergraduate degree:**

120 semester credit hours

**11. Give the number of credit hours students may earn for internship experience:**

1 to 6 semester credit hours

**12. List each professional journalism or mass communications sequence or specialty offered and give the name of the person in charge.**

<u>Name of Sequence or Specialty</u>	<u>Person in Charge</u>
Advertising major	Nneka Logan, PR/ADV Division coordinator
Multimedia Journalism major	Michael Horning, JMC Division coordinator
Public Relations major	Nneka Logan, PR/ADV Division coordinator
Sports Media and Analytics major	Michael Horning, JMC Division coordinator

The school is organized into three curriculum divisions: **Communication Studies (CMST)**, **Journalism and Mass Communication (JMC)**, and **Public Relations and Advertising (PR/ADV)**. Each division is responsible for specific majors. The three divisions share responsibility for the school’s core (COMM) curriculum. The major overseen by the CMST Division (*Communication*) doesn’t involve journalism or mass communication education and is not being reviewed for accreditation.

**13. Number of full-time students enrolled in the institution:** 38,101 (30,504 undergraduate students, 7,597 graduate and professional students) in fall 2023.

**14. Number of undergraduate majors in the accredited unit, by sequence.**

Name of Sequence or Specialty	Fall '23 (Primary)	Fall '23 (Secondary)	Total Majors
Advertising	102	5	107
Communication	279	18	297
Multimedia Journalism	139	9	148
Public Relations	166	10	176
Sports Media and Analytics	300	11	311
Total			1039

**15. Number of students in *each section* of all skills courses (newswriting, reporting, editing, photography, advertising copy, broadcast news, public relations writing, etc.). List enrollment by section for the term during which the visit will occur and for the preceding term. Submit two semesters with the self-study and update the list as needed for spring 2024 visits. Include a separate list for *online skills courses*, which also must meet the 20-1 ratio. (The Council has ruled that campaigns courses are exempt from the 20-1 ratio.)**

**Spring 2024**

CRN	Course	Title	Capacity	Seats Enrolled
10227	ADV-3004	Ad Writing and Storytelling	20	15
21135	ADV-3014	Ad Planning & Media Buying	20	16
13188	COMM-2024	Media Writing	20	20
13189	COMM-2024	Media Writing	20	19
13191	COMM-2024	Media Writing	20	20
13192	COMM-2024	Media Writing	20	19
13193	COMM-2024	Media Writing	20	19
13194	COMM-2024	Media Writing	20	20
21570	COMM-2024	Media Writing	20	20
13195	COMM-2034	Visual Media	20	20
13196	COMM-2034	Visual Media	20	20
13197	COMM-2034	Visual Media	20	20
13199	COMM-2034	Visual Media	20	20
13200	COMM-2034	Visual Media	20	20
13201	COMM-2034	Visual Media	20	19
13202	COMM-2034	Visual Media	20	20
21569	COMM-2034	Visual Media	20	19
19360	PR-3144	Writing and Editing for PR	19	13
19361	PR-3144	Writing and Editing for PR	14	14
19362	PR-4304	Public Relations Campaigns	18	18
19363	PR-4304	Public Relations Campaigns	24	15
16965	JMC-3154	Multimedia Reporting	19	19
16966	JMC-3154	Multimedia Reporting	20	20
16967	JMC-3154	Multimedia Reporting	19	19
16968	JMC-3174	Advanced Multimedia Rep.	18	17
16970	JMC-3314	Sports Journalism	24	24

16971	JMC-3324	Sports Play-by-Play Rep.	20	10
16976	JMC-4274	Broadcasting Performance	19	15
16977	JMC-4274	Broadcasting Performance	19	19
16979	JMC-4814	Digital Newsroom: Online	16	16
21174	JMC-4824	Digital Newsroom: Broadcast	15	13
16981	JMC-4834	Sportscenter	19	19
21146	JMC-4834	Sportscenter	19	19

### Fall 2023

CRN	Course	Title	Capacity	Seats Enrolled
90673	ADV 3304	Ad Writing and Storytelling	20	7
90674	ADV 3014	Ad Planning & Media Buying	20	5
83190	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	20
83191	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	10
83192	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	9
83193	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	7
83194	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	17
83195	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	18
83196	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	20
83197	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	6
83198	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
83199	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
83200	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
83201	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
83202	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
83203	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	10
83204	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	16
83205	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	11
83206	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	13
91564	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	5
86816	JMC 3154	Multimedia Reporting	19	19
86817	JMC 3154	Multimedia Reporting	19	19
86818	JMC 3174	Advanced Multimedia Reporting	20	17
86822	JMC 3314	Sports Journalism	20	7
86823	JMC 3314	Sports Journalism	20	14
86824	JMC 3324	Sports Play-by-Play Reporting	20	5
86826	JMC 4114	Photojournalism	20	16
86828	JMC 4274	Broadcasting Performance	20	6
86829	JMC 4274	Broadcasting Performance	20	2
86831	JMC 4824	Digital Newsroom: Broadcast	18	9
86832	JMC 4834	Sportscenter	15	15
89223	PR 3144	Writing and Editing for PR	19	8

89224	PR 3144	Writing and Editing for PR	18	13
89226	PR 4304	Public Relations Campaigns	20	18
89227	PR 4304	Public Relations Campaigns	20	6

### Spring 2023

CRN	Course	Title	Capacity	Seats Enrolled
21101	ADV 3004	Ad Writing and Storytelling	20	2
13201	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	20
13202	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	16
13203	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	20
13204	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	19
13205	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	20
21127	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	10
21131	COMM 2024	Media Writing	20	20
13207	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
13208	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
13209	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	17
13210	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
13211	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
21135	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
21136	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
21747	COMM 2034	Visual Media	20	20
16935	JMC 3154	Multimedia Reporting	20	19
16936	JMC 3154	Multimedia Reporting	20	17
21137	JMC 3154	Multimedia Reporting	20	14
16938	JMC 3174	Advanced Multimedia Reporting	15	13
16945	JMC 3314	Sports Journalism	15	15
21745	JMC 3324	Sports Play-by-Play Reporting	20	14
16950	JMC 4274	Broadcasting Performance	20	14
21144	JMC 4274	Broadcasting Performance	20	20
16954	JMC 4814	Digital Newsroom: Online	20	19
21746	JMC 4814	Digital Newsroom: Online	20	20
16956	JMC 4834	Sportscenter	20	20
19300	PR 3144	Writing and Editing for PR	20	17
19301	PR 3144	Writing and Editing for PR	20	13
19305	PR 4304	Public Relations Campaigns	24	18
19306	PR 4304	Public Relations Campaigns	24	23

**16. Total expenditures planned by the accredited unit for the 2023–2024 academic year:**  
\$3,571,980.

**Amount expected to be spent this year on full-time faculty salaries:** \$2,556,080 (2023-2024).

**17. List name and rank of all full-time faculty in the accredited unit. (Full-time faculty refers to those defined as such by the university.) Identify those not teaching because of leaves, sabbaticals, etc.**

NAME	RANK	DIVISION <sup>1</sup>
Kuypers, Jim A.	Professor	JMC
Myers, M. Cayce	Professor	PR/ADV
Tedesco, John C. <sup>2</sup>	Professor	PR/ADV
Holloway, Rachel L. <sup>2</sup>	Associate Professor	PR/ADV
Holz, Adrienne M.	Associate Professor	PR/ADV
Horning, Michael A.	Associate Professor	JMC
Logan, Nneka	Associate Professor	PR/ADV
Mielczarek, Natalia	Associate Professor	JMC
Smith, Stephanie A.	Associate Professor	PR/ADV
Watkins, Brandi A. <sup>3</sup>	Associate Professor	PR/ADV
Duncan, Megan	Assistant Professor	JMC
Woods, Chelsea L.	Assistant Professor	PR/ADV
Shinault Deuyour, Hannah	Collegiate Assistant Professor	PR/ADV
Reed, Robin	Professor of Practice	JMC
Roth, William B.	Professor of Practice	JMC
Brown, Charmayne Smalls	Associate Professor of Practice	JMC
Amey, Anthony L.	Assistant Professor of Practice	JMC
Robinson, Syrenthia J.	Senior Instructor	JMC
Jenkins, Dale M.	Advanced Instructor	JMC
Woolly, Jared M.	Instructor	JMC

**18. List names of part-time/adjunct faculty teaching at least one course in fall 2023. Also list names of part-time faculty teaching spring 2023. (If your school has its accreditation visit in spring 2024, also provide the spring 2024 adjunct list in the updated information.)**

**Spring 2023**

NAME	RANK	COURSE
Babb, Lujean	Adjunct Instructor	COMM 2023: Visual Media
Brown, Ann H.	Adjunct Instructor	COMM 2024: Media Writing
Jefferies, Dawn	Adjunct Instructor	PR 3144: Writing & Editing for PR
Spiller, Carrie C.	Adjunct Instructor	ADV 3014: Ad Writing & Brand Storytelling
Van Dyke, Cory M.	Adjunct Instructor	PR 3144: Writing & Editing for PR

<sup>1</sup> JMC Division faculty members have curriculum and instructional responsibilities for courses in the Multimedia Journalism and Sports Media and Analytics majors. PR/ADV Division faculty members have curriculum and instructional responsibilities for courses in the Advertising and Public Relations majors.

<sup>2</sup> Not teaching in fall 2023 or spring 2024 because of administrative duties.

<sup>3</sup> Research Leave Fall 2023

**Fall 2023**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>COURSE</b>
Babb, Lujean	Adjunct Instructor	COMM 2023: Visual Media
Bond, M. Aaron	Adjunct Instructor	COMM 2023: Visual Media
Brown, Ann H.	Adjunct Instructor	COMM 2024: Media Writing
Jefferies, Dawn	Adjunct Instructor	PR 3144: Writing & Editing for PR
Spiller, Carrie C.	Adjunct Instructor	ADV 3014: Ad Writing & Brand Storytelling
Timofeev, Bradley	Adjunct Instructor	ADV 3024: Ad Planning & Media Buying
Van Dyke, Cory M.	Adjunct Instructor	PR 3144: Writing & Editing for PR

**19. For each of the last two academic years, please give the total number of graduates from the unit.**

- 2022-23 academic year: 225
- 2021-22 academic year: 219



## PART II — Standard 1: Mission, Governance and Administration

The School has experienced rapid enrollment growth; it has a new director who is supported by the dean and faculty.

### Unit performance with regard to indicators:

**(a) The unit has a written mission statement and a written strategic long-range plan that provides vision and direction for its future, meaningful short-term measurements, identifies needs and resources for its mission and goals and is supported by university administration outside the unit.**

<https://liberalarts.vt.edu/departments-and-schools/school-of-communication/mission-strategic-plan.html>

The School has a written mission statement and strategic plan. The dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences speaks favorably of the unit but notes the School has experienced “rocket growth” and now needs to take a moment to reflect on its educational and scholarly strategic vision.

**The unit posts its mission statement and strategic plan in a prominent, easy-to-find place on its website.**

The mission statement and strategic plan are located on the School’s homepage. The strategic plan is part of a Google Document available on the homepage. Strategic planning appears within a lengthy Academic Program Review completed in Fall 2023. There is consistent evidence of School mission and strategic planning steps.

**Describe in detail how the mission statement/strategic plan is implemented, plays into the daily life of the unit and its effectiveness in driving progress. Who has responsibility for keeping the plan updated? Is it revised regularly to deal with rapidly changing issues of instruction and technology?**

The strategic plan includes a history of the unit as part of its previous program review. The document’s executive summary and additional narrative help the reader understand the School’s progress and challenges, especially during the COVID years. The unit normally completes an academic program review and plan every five years. The strategic plan notes the post-pandemic period was a “maintenance mode” for the unit where the school lost six tenured or tenure-track faculty to retirements or departures. The School has maintained strategic goals from the 2016 program review, last reviewed and updated in 2023, in keeping with COVID disruptions. The School experienced leadership change for the director and associate director roles in 2022 and 2023, respectively, and has a new business manager. The School is currently searching for two new faculty. The dean anticipates the School will be able to hire two or three more faculty in the next fiscal year.

In the previous Academic Program Review and current Self-Study, the unit identified priorities and opportunities for the School to consider for the next five years. These continuing priorities include:

- increasing the number of research faculty and raising the school’s research profile.
- developing the Digital Media undergraduate degree in the era of increased media convergence.
- identifying a clear direction for the undergraduate Communication major.
- increasing experiential activities for School undergraduates, and
- transitioning at least one of the graduate degrees to an online degree.

Further along in the planning document, the School notes that, “Many of the school’s priorities remain the same as in 2016.” Here the School of Communication identified strategic objectives that align with accreditation:

- to decrease the student to faculty ratio with support from the CLAHS dean.
- to have our mass communication curriculum accredited by the ACEJMC.
- to expand our curriculum to ensure digital media content creation and effects are included – either as a major or through transformation of existing majors.
- to emphasize experiential learning as an important expectation for our majors.
- to contribute to the research priorities of the university and its strategic 2047 Vision, Beyond Boundaries.
- to increase our research profile while fostering an environment that is inclusive, diverse, and equitable.
- to build a center for communication research and community, and
- to identify a platform to share and exhibit student content publicly.

**(b) The unit’s administration provides effective leadership within the unit and effectively represents it in dealings with university administration outside the unit and constituencies external to the university.**

**Characterize in depth the leadership of the unit as an agent for progress, advocate for the unit’s fields of study within the university and aggressive connector with alumni. What significant achievements can be attributed to the leader? Has the leader built partnerships within the university? Is the leader seen as a strong advocate on matters of diversity, inclusion and equity? Is faculty and student diversity improving? Do scholars and professionals work collaboratively? Is creativity in curriculum, teaching and research sought and rewarded? Is the leader driving forward the curriculum (while respecting faculty governance and required process) to keep up with a rapidly changing media world?**

The School of Communication was formed July 1, 2020. Prior to this change, it was the Department of Communication. The School of Communication is one of 17 academic units (and one of three academic units with school designation) within Virginia Tech’s College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences (CLAHS). At Virginia Tech, the terms “school” and “department” refer to equivalent administrative structures. The School has limited administrative autonomy, with annual budget and personnel allocations coming from the college dean. As with many

universities across the country, Virginia Tech and the School of Communication encountered an odd combination of speed bumps during COVID. This included a failed external search for a director and unsuccessful effort to launch a new degree, but the program has experienced rapid growth in enrollment and faculty express support of the School's application to become an accredited School, a topic that has been on the program's agenda for more than a decade.

The School of Communication is headed by a director, Dr. John Tedesco. Former interim director Dr. Douglas Cannon was the architect behind the School's accreditation plan. Cannon retired in 2023. Dr. Bob Denton, a former director who retired in 2022 was the first unit leader to support pursuing accreditation. The School associate director is Dr. Hannah Shinault Deuyour.

Faculty speak highly of the new director, noting he came to the position after the former director's retirement. A COVID-complicated search for an external director hire resulted in no replacement thus the dean launched an internal director search. One long-term faculty member said, "John is the right person for the job. He knows the School, students and faculty."

Another spoke of the director's willingness to remind faculty to pause and celebrate community within the program.

Another reported the director is "...gaining his confidence and is the right person for the job now."

Still another praised the new director for his "listening tour" among all faculty and his desire to "strive for bottom-up approaches rather than top down."

The director reports to the CLAHS dean, Dr. Laura Belmonte. The director has primary administrative responsibility for all personnel, budget, program, equipment, and facility matters related to the School. The director serves on the Department Heads Council, a consultative body to the University Council.

School leadership organized the unit into three curriculum divisions: Communication Studies (CMST), Journalism and Mass Communication (JMC), and Public Relations and Advertising (PR/ADV) to determine curriculum requirements and to develop courses.

Department administrators from Health and Agriculture noted strong partnerships with the School to develop Health Communication and Agriculture Communication, using courses offered by the School and making Health and Ag courses available to School students. Representatives speak highly of the unit's growth, innovation and reputation across campus.

Similarly, two news directors from in-market television stations compare School students favorably with students and entry employees they have hired in other markets where they have worked.

**(c) The unit annually updates its data on the ACEJMC searchable database website (<https://lookup.acejmc.org>).**

Virginia Tech is not yet an accredited program but the School has provided information for the ACEJMC searchable database. As expected of all schools, the entries include a program profile, tuition and related cost estimates, student enrollment profiles, and retention and graduation data.

**(d) The unit gathers, maintains and analyzes enrollment, retention and graduation data and posts them annually in a prominent, easy-to-find place on its websites.**

The self-study and additional conversations with administrators, faculty and students suggests the School is regularly analyzing enrollment data. Website data were up to date and contained information sufficient to answer most student, parent or site team member questions about the program. The School has experienced consistent growth in the past five years, becoming the second largest unit in the college. The challenge now is to ensure the School can address its growth with sufficient faculty resources.

**On indicators (e), (f) and (g) the site team should make sure the unit operates within accepted academic norms and need only report in detail on extraordinary situations, cases or variances from policy.**

**(e) The unit has policies and procedures for substantive faculty governance that ensure faculty oversight of educational policy and curriculum.**

[The School of Communication Faculty Guide](#) augments policies and procedures in the university [Faculty Handbook](#). All full-time School faculty members review and ratify the governance document at least once every five years. Information on faculty promotion and tenure was updated in May 2022. A majority vote of the full-time School faculty is required to change policies or procedures in the document. Faculty members in the practice ranks and instructors elect the committees that deal with their evaluation and promotion.

Faculty members in School administrative roles are appointed by the director. Faculty elect members of all School committees except Undergraduate Curriculum. That committee consists of the director of undergraduate programs, the three division coordinators, and a fifth member appointed by the School director.

A full structure and accompanying practices are outlined in the Communication Faculty Guide. During Academic Year 2022-2023, the School of Communication faculty met eight times in general sessions. Curriculum divisions hold separate meetings.

The university has adopted a new software and approval process for new courses and curriculum changes, empowering the college to approve such changes on behalf of departments and schools. Course approvals previously required more than 250 days but are now accomplished in about two months.

**(f) The institution and/or the unit defines and uses a process for selecting and evaluating its administrators.**

Section 1.2.2 of the School of Communication Faculty Guide describes in detail the process for appointing, evaluating, and reappointing the School director. The process involves administrator

and faculty review in their shared governance. The Faculty Handbook presents the appointment or reappointment policies and procedures across the university. Term appointments are for three academic years. Reappointment is possible. The current director (an internal candidate) was hired after two external candidates did not accept employment offers. The dean identified the candidate but had the candidate submit a formal application for the position that was shared with the faculty.

When review time comes, the Dean appoints a faculty and peer review committee for director reviews during the final year of the term whenever reappointment is a possibility, or at least every five years. The review focuses on the individual's administrative activities and accomplishments within the unit or areas s/he oversees. The review committee includes tenured and non-tenured faculty, a nonacademic staff member and a unit head or other administrator from outside the School. The current director assumed the role with the start of the 2022 – 2023 academic year and has not been evaluated.

The results of the administrative evaluation will be communicated to the faculty. If a majority of the faculty consider the evaluation to be satisfactory, the Personnel Committee will recommend reappointment on behalf of the School to the Dean.

**(g) Faculty, staff and students have avenues to express concerns and have them addressed.**

The School of Communication follows Virginia Tech policies for complaint resolution. The Virginia Tech [Faculty Handbook](#) outlines procedures to resolve complaints by faculty members who allege a violation, misinterpretation, or incorrect application of a university policy, procedure, or practice that directly affects them. This includes policies covering tenured and tenure-track faculty members and non-tenure-track instructional faculty members.

When the School director receives a complaint letter from a student, the director may handle the response or delegate the response to the associate director, director of undergraduate programs, or graduate director for disposition. The person handling the complaint investigates the situation, shares findings (when appropriate) with the School Executive Committee, and responds directly to the student in writing, by phone, via Zoom, or in person.

The [Dean of Students](#) Office coordinates other areas of student complaint and concern. Students are advised to write a letter to the School director and should include an overview of the problem and the remedy requested. The Dean of Students office provides a link to student conduct software Maxient to receive reports of other general student concerns.

For staff concerns, the Virginia Tech [Division of Human Resources](#) administers a state-designed [process for employee grievances](#).

**SUMMARY:**

A senior unit administrator drove much of the School growth. With the retirement of that director and an associate director, new leadership is in place. There are style differences but faculty and the dean support the leadership, the desire to become an accredited program, and the direction the program is moving.

**Overall evaluation compliance/non-compliance: COMPLIANCE**

## PART II — Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

### Unit performance with regard to indicators:

Discussions of indicators b, c and f should describe and evaluate individual academic sequences in the unit.

**(a) Students in the unit complete academic requirements for a baccalaureate degree that meet the liberal arts and sciences/general education requirements of the institution. Programs may identify classes within the unit that contribute to a liberal arts and social sciences perspective for graduates from the unit.**

The School of Communication offers undergraduate majors in Advertising, Communication, Multimedia Journalism, Public Relations and Sports Media and Analytics leading to the Bachelor of Arts in Communication. Three of the five majors: Multimedia Journalism, Public Relations and Sports Media and Analytics were reviewed.

To receive the degree, students must complete 120 credit hours of coursework, at least 72 hours of which must be taken outside of Communication. The latter includes 45 hours from the university's Pathways general education courses which cover seven core concepts: Discourse, Critical Thinking in the Humanities, Reasoning in the Social Sciences, Reasoning in the Natural Sciences, Quantitative and Computational Thinking, Critique and Practice in Design and the Arts, and Critical Analysis of Identity and Equity in the United States.

Thirteen of the school's courses, representing three Pathways concepts meet the university's general education requirements. Examples include CMST 3214: Professional Communication (advanced discourse), JMC 2074: Introduction to Sports Media (reasoning in the social sciences) and COMM 2094: Communication and Issues of Diversity (critical analysis of identity and equity in the United States). Although students are not permitted to use Pathways courses to meet both general education and core degree requirements, they are allowed to use them simultaneously toward general education and major specific requirements which frees up some of the 72 hours for electives.

In addition to the requirements noted above, students must take 46 credit hours of coursework in the major and complete a minor or cognate (18 hours) or a second major.

**(b) The unit provides a balance between theoretical and conceptual courses, professional skills courses, and courses that integrate theory and skills to achieve the range of student values and competencies listed by the Council.**

Per the self-study, the School of Communication's undergraduate majors in Multimedia Journalism, Public Relations and Sports Media and Analytics "prepare students for careers in advertising, broadcasting, corporate communication, digital media production, journalism, public relations and sports media. Coursework . . . balances instruction between theoretical concepts and practical application of techniques for message creation, delivery and analysis."

Curricula in the three majors are designed to instill in students the ACEJMC professional values and competencies. A review of the Spring 2024 syllabi indicated which competencies were aligned with course objectives in each of the School's core and area-specific classes. Each syllabus also included assignments tied to those objectives and competencies.

All of the School's students must complete a 19-credit hour core that focuses on writing, diversity, research and law. Students in Multimedia Journalism, Public Relations and Sports Media and Analytics also are required to take COMM 2034 Visual Media. Of the seven core courses, six are conceptual while the seventh, COMM 2024 Media Writing is skills-based. Twenty-seven credits of major-specific courses and electives comprise the remainder of the required 46 hours. The percentage of coursework in skill-building professional courses is 26% in Public Relations, 52% in Multimedia Journalism and 58% in Sports Media and Analytics.

### **Multimedia Journalism**

As of fall 2023, there were 148 students, about 14% of the School's total, in the Multimedia Journalism major. In addition to the core classes and COMM 2034 Visual Media, students take four major-specific courses: JMC 3154 Multimedia Reporting, JMC 3174 Advanced Multimedia Reporting, JMC 4334 Communication Ethics and JMC 4814 Digital Newsroom: Online or JMC 4823 Digital Newsroom: Broadcast. Students complete their major requirements by taking 12 credits of COMM or JMC elective courses, three credits of which must be theory-based.

### **Public Relations**

As of fall 2023, there were 176 students, about 17% of the School's total, in the Public Relations major. The public relations curriculum follows recommendations from the Commission on Public Relations Education. In addition to the core classes and COMM 2034 Visual Media, Public Relations students take five major specific courses: PR 2044 Principles of Public Relations, PR 3014 Public Relations Cases, PR 3144 Writing and Editing for Public Relations, PR 4304 Public Relations Campaigns and PR 4414 Public Relations Standards and Practices. Nine credits of electives round out the major requirements.

### **Sports Media and Analytics**

Sports Media and Analytics became a major in fall 2021 and has quickly become the School's most popular. As of fall 2023, there were 311 students, about one-third of the School's total. As is the case with Multimedia Journalism and Public Relations, students in Sports Media and Analytics must complete the core course requirements and COMM 2034 Visual Media. Major-specific requirements are: JMC 2074 Introduction to Sports Media, JMC 3154 Multimedia Reporting, JMC 3314 Sports Journalism, JMC 4274 Broadcast Performance and JMC 4834 Sportscenter. Students complete the major by taking nine credits of COMM, JMC or PR electives.

In our conversations with them, students reported the curriculum is easy to navigate and that frequent contact with their faculty advisers keep them up to date on approaching deadlines. Several students said the university's DARS (Degree Audit Reporting System) makes it easy for them to stay on top of what they need to do to graduate in four years.

Some students did say they wished there were more opportunities to take electives within the

School and that there were more analytics offerings for Sports Media and Analytics majors.

**(c) Instruction, whether on-site or online, synchronous or asynchronous, is demanding and current, and is responsive to professional expectations of digital and technological media competencies.**

There are two types of full-time faculty members in the School of Communication: tenure/tenure-track and instructional. Workloads for faculty are determined by these categories with those in the former teaching two classes per semester and those in the latter teaching three or four, depending on whether they are professors of practice or instructors. This mix of faculty helps ensure instruction is demanding and current. Many of the School's faculty serve on the boards of professional organizations while one continues to work as a morning managing editor and news anchor at a Roanoke television station and another does play-by-play work for ESPN and CBS. Each semester, the School hires a handful of industry professionals as adjunct instructors.

One alumnus we spoke with said the setting for one of his multimedia journalism classes was similar to a newsroom. He also was appreciative of the opportunities to use state-of-the-art equipment and professional-level software to complete assignments that included building a website portfolio.

**(d) The unit demonstrates efforts to connect faculty and administrators to the professions they represent, with a specific understanding of the changing skills needed to be successful in the workplace.**

Faculty members and administrators stay up to date on technological trends in journalism, public relations and sports media by regularly interacting with industry practitioners and school alumni. Students are required to have a laptop computer and purchase the university's software bundle, which includes the Adobe Suite of products. Instruction takes place in one of the School's computer labs, television studio or control room. The School's full-time studio engineer works directly with students and attends the annual National Association of Broadcasters annual show.

Public Relations faculty are active in the local Public Relations Society of America Chapter. Three serve on the Commission on Public Relations Education and another serves on the PRSA board of directors.

**(e) Student-faculty classroom ratios facilitate effective teaching and learning in all courses. Except for campaigns courses, the ratio in skills and laboratory sections, whether on-site or online, should not exceed 20-1.**

In both Spring and Fall 2023, enrollment in each section of the School's skills classes was 20 students or fewer. In JMC 4304: Public Relations Campaigns was capped at 24 in Spring 2023 and 20 in Fall 2023.

**(f) The unit advocates and encourages opportunities for internship and other professional experiences outside the classroom and supervises and evaluates them when it awards**



**academic credit. Units may award academic credit for internships in fields related to journalism and mass communications, but credit should not exceed six semester credits (or nine quarter hours).**

**When students take courses for internship credit at appropriate professional organizations, the unit must show ongoing and extensive dual supervision by the unit's faculty and professionals.**

**Students may take up to nine semester credits (or their equivalent) at professional media outlets owned and operated by the institution where full-time faculty are in charge and where the primary function of the media outlet is to instruct students.**

While the School has long encouraged students to take advantage of internships and other professional experience opportunities, it has not required them to do so. The self-study states most Multimedia Journalism and Public Relations students have completed internships, but notes that few enrolled in COMM 4204: Communication Internship primarily because it was graded pass-fail and could not be counted toward graduation requirements. Students who were interested in enrolling in the course were guided by the School's Internship Handbook, which details the processes and procedures for completing the internship and earning course credit. Internship providers were required to sign an employer-student agreement that outlined the internship expectations and submit a mid-term progress report as well as a final report/evaluation.

When asked whether they received a formal evaluation from their internship supervisors, students said the feedback they received was largely informal. A few did report having to fill out a form, but there wasn't a mechanism for them to provide an official evaluation of their experience.

To enable students to apply internship credit toward graduation and to meet the requirements for a SACSCOC-mandated "bridge experience," in the 2022-2023 academic year School faculty from Multimedia Journalism and Public Relations as well as those from Sports Media and Analytics approved changing the grading in COMM 4204 from pass-fail to A-F. The change became effective in fall 2023.

In fall 2022, the School director appointed a tenured faculty member to serve as internship coordinator, a newly created position. The coordinator's responsibilities include serving as a liaison between the School and internship providers, approving internship agreements and supervising and grading student internship work. Students are now able to count up to six credits from internships toward graduation requirements.

#### **SUMMARY:**

The School of Communication's curriculum is easy for students to navigate and includes a mix of conceptual and skills-based classes. ACEJMC values and competencies are included on course syllabi and tied to class objectives and assignments. Instruction is up-to-date and classrooms well-equipped. Internship processes and evaluations are largely informal.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: COMPLIANCE**

## PART II — Standard 3: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

*The Accrediting Committee and Council seek site-team reports on assessment that are appropriately detailed for a judgment on compliance that is informed, fair and consistent from one team to another.*

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

**(a) The unit has a written assessment plan that has been implemented, is up to date and addresses contemporary curricular issues, including instruction related to the rapidly changing digital media world.**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lhZngYyYSQ-pR5pZJ9HSTKJ1RX2d9khC/view>

**The unit posts its assessment plan in a prominent, easy-to-find place on its website.**

The Assessment Plan is available as a unit of the Mission and Strategic Plan. While accessible, one would need to know where to look for the plan. Given the nature of faculty discussions of assessment, it is understandable why the document occupies this location. It is publicly available but not a leading item on the School's website.

**(b) The unit defines the goals for learning that students must achieve, including the professional Values and Competencies” of the Council. (See Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction.)**

JMC/SMA and PR/ADV assessment is closely tied to the ACEJMC professional values and competencies as indicators of performance for degree-level student learning outcomes. Course learning objectives align with and are intended to foster those values and competencies. A review of syllabi and conversations with faculty affirm these practices.

**(c) The unit has a written assessment plan that uses multiple direct and indirect measures to assess student learning.**

The School's written assessment plan is available online, with a strong connection to ACEJMC Values and Competencies. Both direct and indirect measures inform the assessment process.

### **Direct measures:**

Two comprehensive direct measures assess all students in the JMC/SMA and PR/ADV programs. Students complete the COMM 2024 Media Writing grammar test. This provides an assessment opportunity through a 50-item multiple-choice asynchronous test administered through the Canvas class management system. Students have two attempts during a semester to earn a benchmark passing grade of 70%. Students must pass the test to receive a final grade in COMM 2024 and to move forward in their program of study. Students who do not pass receive an Incomplete grade and cannot enroll in any courses for which COMM 2024 is a prerequisite. Students with Incompletes take the online test repeatedly until they pass it.

A second direct measure assesses the graduating cohort in Multimedia Journalism, Public Relations, and Sports Media and Analytics through final product review of student work in newsroom and sports center content production classes and writing and editing for public

relations and public relations campaign classes. This student project assessment is an annual event involving multiple three-person panels who review final student products from capstone courses. Each panel consists of two working professionals (general journalists, sports journalists, or accredited public relations practitioners) and one educator. The educators are usually Virginia Tech faculty members from the JMC/SMA or PR/ADV divisions who are not involved during the semester of assessment with any of the courses providing work examples. Occasionally, a division may recruit an educator from a peer institution.

The associate director coordinates data gathering and analysis and provides assessment results to the division coordinators, who share them with division faculty members. The associate director uses results from the ACEJMC values and competencies as indicators of performance for the six B.A. in Communication student learning outcomes. The results are reported each June to the Virginia Tech Office of Analytics and Institutional Effectiveness and to faculty at their August retreat.

A third direct measure assesses students in Public Relations. All Public Relations majors are required to take the Universal Public Relations Accreditation Board Certificate in Public Relations exam as part of PR 4404: Public Relations Standards and Practices. The School receives scores and uses these results to measure six areas: Four-step campaign process (research, planning, implementation, and evaluation), business literacy, ethics and law, communication theories and models, crisis communication, and concepts and current issues in public relations. The associate director uses test results from three of the knowledge areas (four-step process, ethics and law, and communication models and theories) as indicators of student competency.

**Indirect measures:**

Indirect assessment measures need to be improved. A student survey provides an indirect assessment. Data collected from graduating seniors measures students' perceptions of faculty members in their major and courses that helped students become better communicators. The School reports the number of respondents has recently been too low to yield valuable insights. The School reports there may be an option to prompt survey participation through graduation approval.

A second indirect assessment comes though survey results associated with student participation in internships. Internship assessment is often used as a direct measure but many Tech students do not complete a formal internship for academic credit. In some cases, the School is only tangentially connected with the internship. This limits the ability of the unit to rely on internship data as a direct measure. The School reports steps have been completed (effective Spring 2024) to simplify the process for internship credit. This should yield a larger body of helpful data in the upcoming semesters. Data collected now is used by the program units. The School notes that correcting the internship credit procedure is one more way they have examined their curriculum and closed the loop with assessment.

Similar to the direct measures, the associate director reports indirect data during the annual retreats and to the Virginia Tech Office of Analytics & Institutional Effectiveness.

**(d) At least one direct and/or indirect measure should include journalism and mass communication professionals engaged in assessment data collection.**

Media professionals are actively engaged in evaluating student work as a direct assessment measure. Final projects completed by students in JMC 4814, 4824: Digital Newsroom (online or broadcast), JMC 4834: Sportscenter, PR 3144: Writing and Editing for Public Relations, and PR 4304: Public Relations Campaigns are evaluated by professionals.

The self-study identifies a thorough review process with multiple three-person panels reviewing final student products/projects from each course. Each panel consists of two working professionals (general journalists, sports journalists, or accredited public relations practitioners) and one educator. Most professional volunteers are not Virginia Tech graduates.

The assessors individually rate final student products (news packages prepared by individuals, newscasts produced by groups, news websites produced by groups, public relations writing examples from individuals, and public relations campaigns with collateral materials prepared by teams) from each class against a rubric that reflects ACEJMC professional values and competencies. Assessors' judgments of student work can be unacceptable, below expectations, meets expectations, exceeds expectations for entry-level employment.

**(e) The unit collects and reports data from its assessment activities and applies the data to improve curriculum and instruction. There is substantial, concrete evidence of “closing the loop,” generally and specifically. Multiple examples of “closing the loop” are evident.**

The Faculty Retreat provides the first step for “closing the loop” using assessment data. Following the presentation of results, faculty members in the curriculum divisions work during the upcoming academic year to adjust the curriculum based on assessment results.

Changes to the curriculum since the 2015 – 2016 academic year are reported in the self-study. Faculty members addressed consistently weak results for writing mechanics. Public Relations faculty initially instituted a grammar test for Public Relations majors, administered in PR 3144: Writing and Editing for Public Relations. JMC faculty decided to emphasize grammar instruction in Multimedia Journalism courses.

Ultimately, both JMC/SMA and PR agreed to add a grammar test in COMM 2024 Media Writing, a required course for all B.A. in Communication majors. Faculty members in the curriculum divisions approved the proposal. COMM 2024 students began taking a required grammar test in Academic Year 2022-2023. Regarding the grammar test, a faculty member noted, “this sends a message to students that grammar and AP Style are important.”

In 2022 and 2023, poor results on the Certificate in Principles of Public Relations exam for three degree-level student learning outcomes surprised faculty members in the PR/ADV Division. For five years, assessments revealed acceptable outcomes. Division faculty speculated in early 2022-2023 that the 2022 results might be a data outlier related to instructional disruptions during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic but the 2023 report provided evidence of a clear instructional weakness. Faculty in PR are closing the loop by evaluating ways to improve the three outcomes.

Students report their Public Relations Standards and Practices class helps PR knowledge gel in time for the exam but also within their knowledge of the field as they prepare for graduation.

Faculty in JMC/SMA noted that feedback from media professionals examining senior capstone projects identified students' failures to cover stories reporting on marginalized communities. As a result, faculty teaching the senior-level classes helped focus students' attention to topics ranging from transgender athletes in college sports, African Americans' challenges in integrating into the Virginia Tech community, a review of female faculty and their changing roles in the university community, and Native American history behind Virginia Tech's founding.

Students affirmed the School's efforts to close the loop regarding the importance of writing. An Honors student noted that she was "Humbled by AP Style and grammar" that she encountered in Media Writing. More than one student described Media Writing as the most important class in their major.

A senior noted, "If you can write, you can work." A student added that Tweeting in AP Style builds credibility.

A transfer student who entered the program as a junior described writing as "...the quintessential human experience. AP Style is how we put together our stories."

#### **SUMMARY:**

The School has strong direct measures for assessment that have yielded data helpful to instruction and curricular planning. There is evidence of closing the loop by the faculty but more impressive is that students are affirming the importance of writing. Indirect measures need improvement. Changes in internship enrollment will increase the body of data. Strategies to increase graduating student response rates are being studied.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: COMPLIANCE**

## PART II — Standard 4: Diversity and Inclusiveness

### Unit performance with regard to indicators:

**(a) The unit has a written diversity plan that has been implemented and discussed annually, for achieving an inclusive curriculum, a diverse, culturally proficient faculty, staff and student population, and a supportive climate for working and learning and for assessing progress toward achievement of the plan. The diversity plan should focus on domestic minority groups and, where applicable, international groups. The written plan must include the unit's definition of diversity, identify under-represented groups and articulate key performance indicators upon which the unit intends to focus and improve.**

**The unit posts its diversity plan in a prominent, easy-to-find place on its website.**

The School of Communication's "Inclusion and Diversity Plan" was adopted in 2018 and is appropriately listed under a "Mission and Strategic Plan" tab on its homepage which navigates to a trio of School plans that also includes its strategic and assessment plans. The plan defines diversity as "[encompassing] racial, ethnic, and gender inclusiveness as well as a cultural, class, economic, faith, disability, veteran and political inclusiveness."

**(b) The unit's curriculum creates culturally proficient communicators capable of learning with, working on and advancing the value of diverse teams. The unit's curriculum includes instruction on issues and perspectives relating to mass communications across diverse cultures in a global society.**

In the self-study, the School noted COVID hindered the diversity, equity and inclusion planning but not the "practice or outcomes of those plans" and underscored the broader university-wide priority of InclusiveVT. In the six-year period since diversity plan development, the School has made some meaningful strides, including the adoption of a required core course, COMM 2094 Communication and Issues of Diversity. The unit's 2018 diversity plan was developed under the auspices of the Department of Communication, progenitor to the now School. As a result, the current plan does not capture recent developments nor factor the School's progress toward achieving the goals outlined in the plan. The School's Personnel Committee is working on a new diversity plan.

The major curricular milestone was the faculty decision to transition a 4000-level elective course into the 2000-level course (COMM 2094) effective August 2019. The course is part of the School's core curriculum and can be used by students across the university to satisfy a general education requirement.

Sufficient evidence is provided that the School curriculum maps to ACEJMC professional values and competencies, although a clearer picture of how the curricular core relates to the majors in addressing ACEJMC diversity standards could better capture the emphasis of diversity within the core and individual majors.

Conversations with faculty and syllabi review suggest DEI is woven into instruction. In addition, the School offers a two-week study away summer program at a Virginia Tech Center in

Switzerland promoting cross-cultural communication. Students say diversity and inclusion are topical subject areas in the School, and many report it is discussed in all their classes.

**(c) The unit demonstrates effective efforts to enhance all faculty members' understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion and ability to develop culturally proficient communicators capable of learning with, working on and advancing the value of diverse teams. The unit also demonstrates intentional efforts to recruit and retain faculty and professional staff who are from demographics that are historically, domestically marginalized.**

Virginia Tech has earned plaudits from *Insight into Diversity* magazine, where it received its 2022 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award and was a "Diversity Champion" for the seventh year in a row.

Members of university search committees complete an affirmative action training module and each committee has a designated diversity advocate who undergoes additional training. Eleven of the School's faculty have participated in university DEI training courses, including the program director. One faculty member has held DEI-related leadership positions in disciplinary national organizations and another has won a national award for related work in the community.

Other work at the college level subsuming the School includes codifying diversity objectives, hosting teach-ins and special programs such as the Juneteenth Scholar Program, which supports junior faculty involved in research related to inequities, civil rights and DEI.

A recent university job satisfaction survey reported that slightly less than half of university faculty members were satisfied with the university's efforts to recruit and retain diverse faculty and half were satisfied with their college's efforts in this area. Among university staff, 71 percent said their work environments reflected the values of InclusiveVT and 70 percent said the university leadership effectively promotes diversity and inclusion at the university. Surveys of underrepresented faculty members, however, reveal lack of diversity is a top concern for those working at the university.

Between 2018 and 2023, the School hired five full-time underrepresented faculty members, moving from two full-time faculty members to seven. Since the 2020-2021 hiring cycle, the School has made at least one offer – and hire – of a minority candidate per year.

**(d) In alignment with the institution's mission, the unit demonstrates effective efforts to help recruit, retain and graduate a student population reflecting the diversity of the population the institution aims to serve.**

The centralized admissions structure at VT means the School has no influence or input on admissions decisions, all of which are operated through the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. The School uses digital advertising and hosts open houses for student recruitment, and the application pool has grown from 433 in fall 2020 to 1,103 in fall 2023, making the first-year admissions into the School more competitive while enrollment rates vary among minority students. The percentage of admissions offers to Black and Latino applicants went from 10 and 7 percent, respectively, in 2020 to 8 and 7.8 percent in 2023. While Black students represented 13 percent of incoming students in 2020, that number dipped to 8.5 percent in 2023. Latino students conversely increased slightly, from 6 percent of incoming students to 8 percent in 2023. To

incentivize minority (and first-generation) students, the School has provided modest funding each year to admitted students to augment university financial aid packages.

The university has earmarked inclusivity goals for underrepresented minorities among students, faculty and staff through 2028. The School is at or above university goals for underrepresented faculty and incoming first-year students by 2028. The School has no minorities among its seven staff members, five of whom are full-time.

**(e) The unit demonstrates that it has an inclusive climate, free of harassment and all forms of discrimination, in keeping with the acceptable cultural practices of the population it serves, accommodates the needs of those with disabilities, and values the contributions of all forms of diversity.**

All incoming students and transfer students to Virginia Tech are required to complete a DEI module within their first two months on campus. University employees must complete a “Road to Cultural Competency” course during their first year of employment. In addition, employees must complete a workshop in compliance with Policy 1025, Title IX, which covers topics including differences between equity and quality and handling implicit biases.

**Accreditation site visit teams will apply this standard in compliance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations, as well as the laws of the countries in which non-U.S. institutions are located.**

#### **SUMMARY:**

Progress in hiring and retaining minority faculty members remains tepid although there are reasons for optimism based on the demonstrable commitment toward DEI at the college and School levels. The 2018 diversity plan has exceeded its shelf life, with several key performance indicators either expired or requiring an update. Developing a new plan is a priority, and evidence suggests the unit is well poised to build on its DEI foundation to illuminate its progress and identify areas in need of improvement. Students and faculty alike report DEI is supported and valued in and out of the classroom at the School.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: COMPLIANCE**



**Table 6. Faculty Populations, Full-time and Part-time  
Academic year: 2023 – 2024 – Full-time Faculty (N = 32)**

	Female	% of total Faculty	Male	% of total Faculty
Black/African American	4	13%	1	3%
White	16	50%	11	34%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	NA	0	NA
Asian	0	NA	0	NA
Hispanic	0	NA	0	NA
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	0	NA	0	NA
Pacific Islander	0	NA	0	NA
Two of more races	0	NA	0	NA
Other race	0	NA	0	NA
International (any race)	0	NA	0	NA

Academic year: 2023 – 2024 – Part time/Adjunct faculty (N = 7)

	Female	% of total Faculty	Male	% of total Faculty
Black/African American	1	14%	1	14%
White	3	43%	2	29%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	NA	0	NA
Asian	0	NA	0	NA
Hispanic	0	NA	0	NA
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	0	NA	0	NA
Pacific Islander	0	NA	0	NA
Two of more races	0	NA	0	NA
Other race	0	NA	0	NA
International (any race)	0	NA	0	NA

## PART II — Standard 5: Faculty

### Unit performance with regard to indicators:

#### **(a) Full-time faculty have primary responsibility for curricula, oversight of courses, research/creative activity and service.**

Virginia Tech's School of Communication is organized into three curricular divisions: Communication Studies (CMST), Journalism and Mass Communication (JMC) which includes Multimedia Journalism and Sports Media and Analytics, and Public Relations and Advertising (PR/ADV). According to the School's Faculty Guide, "each division determines curriculum requirements for one or more majors in the B.A. in Communication degree program. Divisions are responsible for course development and planning within their majors, instructional standards, instruction, and assessment." The three divisions share responsibility for the School's core (COMM) curriculum.

The School director assigns each full-time faculty member to one of the three curriculum divisions. Appointments are made in light of the faculty member's academic qualifications, professional experience, teaching interests, and research agenda.

The Director of the Undergraduate Program chairs the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. The three division coordinators, who are appointed to three-year terms by the school director, serve as members. An additional member is appointed by the director for a one-year term. Hallway conversations between faculty members often spark larger discussions about curriculum and lead to curricular changes and revisions.

Faculty members in the practice ranks can be elected to the Professor of Practice and Evaluation Committee, while instructors can be elected to the Instructor Evaluation and Promotion Committee. Faculty members from across the School can be elected to the Graduate, Honorifics, or Research and Outreach committees.

The School's faculty serve on university and college committees, with one faculty member currently serving as the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs. Another faculty member chairs the university's Pathways General Education Curriculum Committee.

The School's faculty also are actively engaged in scholarship and creative activity and widely share their work through academic and professional conferences.

As noted in Standard 2, there are two types of full-time faculty members in the School of Communication: tenure/tenure track and instructional. At the time of the site visit, there were 11 tenured or tenure-track faculty members in Journalism and Mass Communication and Public Relations and Advertising, including the school director. There also were nine instructional faculty across the two divisions.

Over the last several years, the School lost six faculty members and because of funding issues has not been able to replace them. In our meeting with them, students lavishly praised the work and dedication of the School's two full-time sports faculty members but commented on the need for more faculty, especially on the analytics side.

At the time of the site visit, the School was searching for one tenure-track faculty member for its Sports Media and Analytics major and one professor of practice for Advertising.

Workloads for faculty are determined by category. Tenure-track faculty teach two courses per semester (35% of their workload) and are expected to devote 45% of their time to research and 20% to teaching. Collegiate faculty and professors of practice teach three courses per semester (60% of their workload) and divide the remainder of their time between service, professional performance and research or administration. Instructors teach four courses per semester and have limited service obligations although some elect to divide their time between teaching (80%), service (10%) and research (10%).

The School of Communication Faculty Guide details the steps for review and promotion to associate professor with tenure as well as for promotion from associate to full for both tenure-track and instructional faculty. For the latter, promotion is recognized with a title change, an increase in the length of an appointment contract and a base salary adjustment.

During the three years preceding the site visit, the percentage of classes taught by full-time faculty was 83% in 2020-2021, 90% in 2021-2022 and 93% in 2022-2023.

**(b) The unit's faculty (full- and part-time) are highly qualified and keep their expertise current through professional development opportunities and maintain relationships with professional and scholarly associations.**

All tenured, tenure-track and collegiate faculty members have terminal degrees with about a third having at least five years of professional media experience. One professor of practice has a doctorate and 25+ years of experience while three others have bachelor's degrees and professional experience that ranges from 25 to 49 years. One instructor has a doctorate and over 15 years of experience while two have master's degrees and at least three years of experience.

School of Communication faculty have taken advantage of professional development opportunities that align with their teaching and research assignments and interests. Several have participated in teaching enhancement workshops through the university's Professional Development Network and Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Participation in these workshops are considered in faculty members' annual performance evaluations.

During the review period, several public relations faculty members developed materials for the Commission on Public Relations Education certification program and another was a Plank Center Education Fellow, as part of a summer program for public relations educators. One of the School's staff members regularly attends the National Association of Broadcasters' annual show as a way of keeping his expertise up to date and networking with industry professionals.

Both tenure-track and instructional faculty are active in professional and scholarly associations. One member led the site team for Mississippi State University's Certification in Public Relations Education review while another served as a Public Relations Society of America Board of Ethics and Standards reviewer. Others are members of or hold leadership positions in organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America, the American Journalism Historians

Association, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the National Communication Association and the National Weather Association.

**(c) The unit requires, supports and rewards faculty research, creative activity and/or professional activity. Expectations for promotion and tenure are clear.**

Each tenure-track faculty member receives a \$15,000 start-up package to be used at their discretion during their first three years at the university. Once tenured they received \$2,500 in professional development funds to attend conferences and for other research-related activities.

Faculty members can apply for grants through the dean's office which funds international travel to conferences and provides support for research with one of the university's global partners.

Non-tenure-track faculty can request professional development funds. In 2023-2024, each instructional faculty member has \$1,000 of these funds.

Every six years a tenured faculty member can request a six-month study/research leave with 100% salary or a full academic year leave with 50% salary. Over the last five years, five of the School's faculty have used these leaves to complete research on hate speech, public communication in the time of COVID-19, corporate racial responsibilities theory development, and the interaction between data analytics, social media and strategic communication.

Faculty can apply to a new Dean's Research Focus Assignment program that will provide course releases that will enable them to concentrate on research.

Tenure and promotion guidelines for both tenure-track and instructional faculty are detailed in the School's Faculty Handbook. In our conversations with them, faculty said the guidelines are clear, the School is supportive and provides both informal and formal mentorship. One faculty member said they were grateful for the guidance they received throughout the process.

**(d) Faculty members communicate the results of research, creative and/or professional activity to other scholars, educators and practitioners through presentations, productions, exhibitions, workshops and publications appropriate to the activity and to the mission of the unit and institution.**

From 2017-2023, the School's faculty members published over 100 articles in peer-reviewed journals, presented 134 refereed conference papers and 28 invited papers. They also completed close to 100 invited creative projects.

They shared their work at regional, national and international conferences for organizations that include the National Communication Association, the International Communication Association, the Virginia Teachers of English Conference, the National Association for Business Communication, the Sports Marketing Association Annual Conference and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

**(e) The faculty has respect on campus for its university citizenship, the quality of education and the scholarly contributions the unit provides.**

As noted in Standard 2, 13 of the School's courses meet the requirements for inclusion in the university's Pathways General Education experience. Department heads in health-related areas in particular, appreciate the opportunity to work with the School's faculty.

**SUMMARY:**

The composition of the School of Communication's faculty in Journalism and Public Relations/Advertising reflects its mission to conduct research, prepare students for positions in the media industries and serve its scholarly and professional communities. The faculty keep current by taking advantage of professional development opportunities and widely share their research. Faculty are committed teachers and their dedication is heartily praised by their students.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: COMPLIANCE**

The following table reports the scholarly output totals for the 21 faculty members in the JMC and PR/ADV Divisions from 2017-2023.

Scholarship, Research, Creative and Professional Activities	Total from Unit*	Individuals				Totals
		Full Professors	Associate Professors	Assistant Professors	Other Faculty **	
Awards and Honors	40	7	11	17	7	42
Grants Received Internal	36	7	9	22	3	41
Grants Received External	13	3	8	4	0	15
Scholarly Books, Sole- or Co-authored	3	1	4	1	0	6
Textbooks, Sole- or Co-authored	10	7	2	3	0	12
Books Edited	8	4	3	1	0	8
Book Chapters	59	17	20	29	0	66
Monographs	0	0	0	0	0	0
Articles in Refereed Journals	86	23	34	59	3	119
Refereed Conference Papers	110	17	29	68	20	134
Invited Academic Papers	28	5	9	12	2	28
Encyclopedia Entries	7	0	3	4	0	7
Book Reviews	3	0	2	1	0	3
Articles in Non-refereed Publications	4	1	1	1	1	4
Juried Creative Works	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-juried Creative Works	94	6	8	25	57	96
Other (please specify) <sup>1</sup>	27	12	19	11	0	42

\*Co-authored work should be counted as a single publication in the unit totals. However, if, for example, two members of the faculty are coauthors on the same journal article, it would be reported as a publication for both authors. \*\*Includes all full-time faculty who do not hold listed ranks, such as instructors and others on term appointments. Many faculty in this category may hold teaching appointments without significant scholarship, research or creative requirements.  
<sup>1</sup> Prefaces, Introductions, or related publication elements.

## PART II — Standard 6: Student Services

### Unit performance with regard to indicators:

**(a) The unit provides students with the support and services that promote learning and ensure timely completion of their program of study.**

Beyond disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the unit has faced challenges that typically come with a growing student population and shifting enrollment levels among majors. On balance, comments from students, faculty and alumni suggest that the School has continued to provide satisfactory support and services to ensure a valued learning experience. It is noteworthy that the School's four-year graduation rate has consistently exceeded the unit's goal of 75% and outperformed the university's rate by a healthy margin.

**(b) Professional advisers, and faculty where appropriate, provide students with academic and career advice.**

Academic advising begins at first-year orientation before the school year begins. It continues during the first term when students must prepare individual degree plans as part of an entry level course (COMM 1004 First-Semester Experience in Communication). In addition, during their first year students are required to take another course (COMM 1015-1016 Communication Skills) and their instructor for this course often serves as their first-year adviser.

Beginning with sophomore year, students receive advising by faculty members or professional staff members at the Academic Advising Center, which serves the entire College of Liberal Arts and Human Services. The Center's staff includes two full-time academic advisors who have office space in Shanks Hall, where the School is located. The full-time advisers have assumed much of the load for academic advising. Faculty members also continue to provide academic advising, as well as advising students on career development. The self-study states: "The advising staff monitors degree progress by individual students. A staff member contacts any student who is not on schedule to complete all coursework in time for his/her planned graduation semester or has not fulfilled one or more key progress-toward-degree requirements."

In meetings with the site team, students reported positive advising experiences. Universally, students said they had contact with their adviser at least once during each academic year and frequently more often. A few said they had to request check-ins with their adviser, but most said regular meetings were initiated by the adviser.

Alumni who spoke with site team members said they were satisfied with their academic advising while students. Several said faculty members had been instrumental in helping them craft post-graduation career strategies and connecting them with potential employers.

A check of the School's website confirms an abundance of information about course listings and curriculum pathways to guide students to graduation. Similar information is available through the website of the Office of the University Registrar; it offers a helpful step-by-step "Guide to Graduation."

Yearly surveys of graduating seniors by the university's Office of Analytics and Institutional Effectiveness include questions to gauge the frequency and quality of the advising. The results of this questionnaire – widely known as the “Senior Survey” – are segmented so that the unit's director sees results specific to the School of Communication. However, he told the site team that the number of responses specific to the School has been so low that it is not possible to draw meaningful conclusions.

The self-study acknowledged as much: “The response rate last year was so low that no patterns could be identified.” It added that the low response rate “reveals that the school is not doing nearly enough to listen to its students and gather feedback. However, the School has taken the Senior Survey seriously.”

**(c) The unit keeps students informed about its policies, activities and requirements.**

Much of the School's communication with students is done through Canvas, the university's campuswide platform that includes instructional tools as well as serving as an online vehicle for making announcements. Students who spoke with the site team said they regularly receive Canvas communications about policies, activities and academic requirements.

The site team noted that the School's website has scant information about upcoming events, and what little exists is out of date. The website's “Attend Communication Events” link lists only one event – the annual week-long “COMM WEEK” – from April, 2023.

**(d) The unit and institution provide extra-curricular activities and opportunities relevant to the curriculum and that help develop the students' professional and intellectual abilities and interests.**

There are ample opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience and education through a variety of campus organizations and media outlets.

An assortment of student-run media outlets operate under the Educational Media Company at Virginia Tech, Inc., an independent governing body that oversees the *Collegiate Times* (news website and weekly newspaper), WUVT radio (FM 90.7), VTTV (on-campus cable channel 33), and a literary magazine titled *Silhouette*. Together, they offer students a range of opportunities to gain “real world” experience in journalism, advertising and business. The Educational Media Company, which has no official affiliation with the School of Communication, is governed by a board that includes students, university faculty and staff, and members of the local Blacksburg community.

The School and the Educational Media Company are preliminarily exploring possibilities for cooperation or some form of integration that might lead to a better learning experience for students involved with these independent media outlets. While the Educational Media Company is marginally profitable, it faces the same daunting financial challenges as commercial media enterprises.



Some faculty members expressed concerns that students working at the Educational Media Company lack sufficient professional oversight to ensure a solid learning experience.

Aside from the independent Educational Media Company, a variety of student organizations are affiliated with the School. The most robust among them appears to be the Virginia Tech chapter of PRSSA (the Public Relations Student Society of America), which manages *UT Prosim PR* (Latin translation, “That I May Serve”), a student-run agency that does pro bono public relations work for campus and community organizations.

The School has a chapter of SPJ, the Society of Professional Journalists. The self-study states that the chapter “won Outstanding Campus Chapter and Outstanding Campus Program honors from SPJ in 2021.” More precisely, that recognition was only for Region 2 of SPJ, which includes Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina and the District of Columbia. Still, the recognition is noteworthy and SPJ’s Virginia Tech chapter appears to be thriving with roughly 20 members, a dedicated adviser and an active program that promotes professional development. The School’s website links to the local chapter’s Facebook page, but it has not been updated in years and counts only 164 followers.

Students may also work for *3304 Sports*, a multi-media platform where they can gain experience covering major sporting events and honing their journalistic skills, including play-by-play broadcasting of games.

Similarly, students can gain experiential learning by working for *Elevate Magazine* which, according to its LinkedIn landing page, is “focused on elevating ethnic minority voices, promoting culture, and sharing a desire for creativity and the arts.”

As noted earlier in Standard 2, internships are encouraged but not required. In addition to signing an employer-student agreement detailing internship expectations, internship providers are expected to submit an evaluation at the midpoint and the conclusion of the internship. Students who spoke with the site team said internship feedback was uneven.

Students are made aware of post-graduate job opportunities in a variety of ways. Alumni interviewed by site team members credited faculty members, including their advisers, with steering them to employment opportunities. Students learn of employment leads through the university’s Office of Career and Professional Development, which lists job openings on Handshake, a national online platform that connects students and recent graduates with employers. The School also has been hosting a “Multimedia Journalism Career and Internship Fair” that attracts media outlets and other companies as participants.

**(e) The unit uses retention and graduation data to improve student services, such as advising, and to reduce barriers to student success.**

The unit has uneven collection and utilization of retention and graduation data. As noted above, the “Senior Survey,” which is intended to gather feedback on student satisfaction with the School’s educational performance, is only marginally useful because its response rate is so low.

The university's Office of Career and Professional Development conducts a "First Destination Survey" each year to gauge the employment status of students within six months of graduation. But the School's director and several faculty members said they are largely unfamiliar with the survey results.

The self-study reports that the School hopes to implement a new method of assessing student satisfaction: "One exciting opportunity for the school to learn more about its students will come through a Bridge Experience survey. As a Bridge Experience program, the school will survey its students about their academic interest, career goals, and opportunities for experiences that help bridge their academic training and career goals."

### **SUMMARY:**

The unit has a robust system for advising and students say they are pleased with the academic and career guidance they receive. Similarly, students say they are kept informed about policies, opportunities and events through Canvas, the university's campuswide portal.

Students have ample opportunities for experiential learning through student-run media outlets operated under the Educational Media Company at Virginia Tech, Inc., which is independent of the university. Students may also get professional development through media outlets and organizations affiliated with the School, including active chapters of PRSSA and SPJ.

The School's mechanism for receiving student feedback from seniors is ineffective. Unit leaders acknowledge that improvement is needed and are discussing the best ways to gather meaningful feedback from graduating seniors on the quality of the education they received from the School.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: COMPLIANCE**

## **PART II — Standard 7: Resources, Facilities and Equipment**

### **Unit performance with regard to indicators:**

#### **(a) The unit has a detailed annual budget for the allocation of its resources that is related to its long-range, strategic plan.**

The School budget process commences with the director and business manager, who jointly compile the annual budget in the spring. This phase includes financial projections and faculty funding requests for budget consideration. The budget is then reviewed at the college level but not finalized until the Board of Visitors approves the budget in early fall.

Two structural considerations in the budget process are the university's Partnership for an Incentive-Based Budget (PIBB) and the state's Equipment Trust Fund (ETF). PIBB is a metric-based system that determines the annual college allocation to the School. The university Office of Budget and Financial Planning manages the ETF to determine funding for campus units to cover computers and technology requests.

The unit reports operations funds are adequate, but increasing enrollment and variable revenues are straining space and resources. Budget revenue also is driven by summer and winter session tuition, course fees and university Foundation accounts. As summer and winter session enrollment fluctuates, the revenue stream is further constrained. These issues will require attention to keep up with the School's overall enrollment growth.

#### **(b) Resources provided by the institution are adequate to achieve the unit's mission and are fair in relation to those provided to other units.**

Despite funding cuts, faculty report they receive adequate professional development funds each year for software, conference travel and registration and books, among others. Although office space is at a premium and nearing a point of concern, the current building and office capacity serves the needs of the unit. Its broadcast studio and control rooms are impressive, replete with the trademark stone architectural motif of Virginia Tech. As per state law, the television studio and control rooms can only be used for instructional purposes, which prohibits student media from operating in those spaces.

The School has not replaced several faculty lines in recent years, which has disproportionately stretched some faculty members. There is widespread agreement across the unit on the need for more tenure-track faculty.

By all measures, the School is deficient in faculty. Its 2016 strategic plan envisaged an additional 11 tenure-track faculty positions by 2021. While total faculty numbers in the School have increased, the number of tenured and tenure-track positions has declined. According to the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia student/faculty formula, the School should have 45-48 full-time faculty for 1,000 students; the School is at 34. The School has two faculty searches underway, but continuing such faculty hiring growth in subsequent years will require attention to

meet what the dean calls the School's "rocket-like growth." Because faculty lines belong to the College, the School relies on the College's financial commitment and bandwidth to support School faculty hiring needs.

**(c) The unit's facilities and information resources enable and promote effective scholarship, teaching and learning.**

Faculty and administrative offices for the School are housed in Shanks Hall, where the School occupies the first floor and some space in the basement and second floor. The Digital Media Center, which houses a suite of resources including a newsroom and equipment check-out room, is adjacent to Shanks in the Moss Arts Center. The School's concurrent access to a trio of rooms in the Center is problematic. Faculty prefer access to the television studio, studio newsroom and computer laboratory simultaneously, which creates unresolved scheduling conflicts. Students in those spaces have access to a Ross graphics package, Avid Media Composer and the Associated Press Electronic News Production System (ENPS). Scheduling conflicts aside, how the unit will manage its growth and house new faculty is a pressing concern. The dean of the college reports efforts to free up space in Shanks Hall, which houses many faculty offices and School administration, citing the formation of an offsite "Policy Hub" that can augment space currently allocated in Shanks.

The School's scheduling authority in the Moss Arts Center is limited, and although it has requested using all three instructional spaces for one section to the Office of University Planning, it has not received clearance to do so. Demand for instructional space and better utilization of the Moss Arts Center are ongoing concerns.

**(d) The institution and the unit provide faculty and students with equipment, or access to equipment, and technical assistance needed to support student learning, curriculum and the research, creative and professional activities of the faculty.**

Students have access to a range of cameras for check-out, including 65 DSLR cameras and round-the-clock access to instructional spaces, ranging from newsrooms to computer laboratories for coursework. Faculty professional development funds are available, and faculty note they can petition for additional funds to the School director or competitively through the College for various funding streams to support research and student activities.

**SUMMARY:**

The School is at a critical juncture with instructional and office space. Meeting those evolving needs based on enrollment growth will require attention and nimble planning. Students and faculty have access to a wide range of high-end software, equipment and resources to more than meet and sustain the academic mission of the School.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: COMPLIANCE**

## PART II — Standard 8: Professional and Public Service

### Unit performance with regard to indicators:

**(a) The unit consults and communicates regularly with its alumni, and actively engages with them, other professionals and professional associations to keep curriculum and teaching current and to promote the exchange of ideas.**

By some measures, the School regularly remains in touch with its alumni. Newsletters, emailed to alumni roughly every quarter, track the successes of graduates as well as on-campus activities and achievements of current School of Communication students. An examination of the last dozen alumni newsletters shows they are newsy and engaging. Similarly, alumni can keep up with School of Communication news via the unit's social media accounts (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter/X), which are updated with varying levels of frequency.

What is missing is a formalized process for seeking and receiving feedback and guidance from alumni working throughout the communication industry. That vehicle previously existed in the form of an Alumni Advisory Board, which at one time met twice a year with School leaders, faculty and students. Board members heard about School initiatives, faculty research, and offered advice on how best to prepare students to enter the workforce. But the Board became inactive during the COVID-19 pandemic and only now is the School planning to revive it.

The self-study explained that the pandemic was not the only reason for the Board becoming dormant: "The group's original focus was curriculum. But college and university development officials pushed for more attention to fundraising. Many board members resisted. Even though some had given major gifts to the unit, most indicated that they did not want to ask others for money. Several board members noted that fundraising was not mentioned when they were asked to serve. The shift in board focus prompted some members to resign or simply to stop participating."

The School's director and several faculty members said the unit is discussing how best to reconstitute an advisory board.

**(b) The unit provides leadership in the development of high standards of professional practice through such activities as offering continuing education, promoting professional ethics, evaluating professional performance, and addressing communication issues of public consequence and concern.**

From the self-study and interviews with faculty, it is clear that many have some level of involvement with academic and communication industry groups. In some cases, that leads to industry professionals speaking to classes or student groups at the School, as well as connections that can result in student internships or post-graduation jobs. Also, a number have appeared on panels or contributed to published research.

But with a few exceptions in recent years, most faculty have not served in significant leadership

roles. To the extent they have, Public Relations faculty eclipse the engagement of those in Mass Communication and Journalism.

Further, the unit has not been sufficiently engaged with Virginia's high school journalism programs, which are an important pipeline of students who might attend Virginia Tech's School of Communication.

The self-study acknowledges this: "The self-study process illuminated the School's uneven involvement with industry, high school journalism, and the community. Most faculty members in the Public Relations and Advertising (PR/ADV) Division are involved in public relations and advertising professional organizations. But faculty members in the Journalism and Mass Communication Division are not as involved as their PR/ADV colleagues in professional news, broadcasting, and sports media organizations. Faculty members in both divisions are not regularly doing professional development workshops for working professionals, judging media contests, or offering community programs on issues in mass communication. The School has not intentionally interacted with high school journalism programs across Virginia. These discoveries have prompted discussions of how the School might better serve Virginia in these areas."

The site team concluded that a major cause of this shortcoming was that the number of faculty did not expand to keep pace with the dramatic increase in enrollment, especially in Sports Media and Analytics in recent years. The result: faculty have been stretched thin, reluctant or unable to undertake extracurricular activities that might dilute their core mission of serving students through classroom instruction.

**(c) The unit contributes to its communities through unit-based service projects and events, service learning of its students and civic engagement of its faculty.**

As noted above from the self-study, the unit has not regularly offered "community programs on issues in mass communication."

**(d) The unit supports scholastic journalism.**

The self-study acknowledges that "The School has not intentionally interacted with high school journalism programs across Virginia."

**SUMMARY:**

The School is actively engaged with its alumni. Those graduates interviewed by the site team said they regularly speak with classes at the School, and students confirmed this. While its Alumni Advisory Board is defunct, the School's leaders and faculty recognize the importance of replacing it and are committed to doing so.

The School needs to deepen its engagement with industry, high school journalism and its surrounding community. The site team noted the candor of the self-study in recognizing this as a shortcoming. Interviews with the School's director and faculty made clear that they are committed to improvements in these areas.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: COMPLIANCE**

### PART III: Summary by site visit team

#### 1) Summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the unit.

##### Strengths:

A growing program, recognized by students and the dean for the rich experiences provided for students.

Highly engaged students who praised the faculty and the quality of the educational experience. Recent graduates of the program similarly spoke highly of their experiences.

Enthusiastic faculty in three categories, tenured/tenure-track, professors of practice and instructors who address research and instructional goals.

Excellent studio facilities.

##### Weaknesses:

Stale strategic and diversity plans needing reflection and updating.

A need for a holistic strategic plan that considers goals and outcomes beyond just enrollment.

A high student-faculty ratio, one of the highest on campus.

Overall space nearing capacity.

#### 2) List the standards with which the unit is not in compliance. N/A

**3) In the case of a recommendation for accreditation or reaccreditation, with *standard(s)* not in compliance, list the deficiencies that need to be addressed before the next site team evaluation. N/A**

**4) In the case of a recommendation for provisional accreditation, list the deficiencies that should be addressed before the provisional status can be removed. N/A**

**5) In the case of a recommendation for denial of accreditation, clearly and fully explain the reasons that led to the recommendation. N/A**

**6) If the unit was previously accredited, summarize *significant* deficiencies noted in the previous report and the actions taken to correct them. If the unit was in noncompliance on the same standard(s) on the previous two visits, identify the standard(s) and the problems noted. Explain actions taken to correct the problems.**

N/A

**7) The self-study is the heart of the accrediting process. Often the quality of that document determines the degree of success of the site visit. Summarize the team members' judgment of the self-study.**

The self-study process was initiated by a now retired associate director. Greater faculty involvement and understanding of the accreditation process would have led to a final document that better told the story on behalf of the School. The self-study development process was not participatory, leading to accreditation knowledge gaps among faculty, staff and unit leadership.

Support for accreditation is real. No one attended either the Committee or Council meeting in the year prior to the accreditation visit. In 2023, a now retired Virginia Tech representative attended a virtual workshop on preparing for accreditation and the August Council business meeting. There was an apparent lack of review of sample self-studies available to programs coming up for review. The team found the School and programs to be better and more ready for accreditation than the self-study report suggested.